

Representative Marcia L. Fudge
“Child Nutrition Assistance: Looking at the Cost of Compliance for States and Schools”
Education & the Workforce Subcommittee Hearing Opening Statement
June 23, 2015 at 10:00a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Today we will be examining school nutrition programs from the eyes of schools and states, which both play an important role in the provision of school meals. While I am looking forward to hearing the testimony of our witnesses, I want to ensure we examine these programs from the eyes of those they are intended to serve as well; our children.

Today, almost one in three children is obese. Nearly 16 million children—one in five—live with food insecurity. While it may not be intuitive, children can simultaneously be both obese and hungry because many low-income families lack access to high-quality healthy food.

Just as there is a federal role in ensuring every child has access to a quality education regardless of where they live, what they look like, or their family's income, there is a federal role in ensuring every child has access to healthy and nutritious food, and is able to learn without the burden of hunger. Child obesity affects all aspects of children's lives from their physical well-being, to their academic success and self-confidence.

That is why the health of our children should be a top national priority. For over forty years, child nutrition programs have helped families who have struggled with the choices of putting food on the table or paying a bill. Our work to reauthorize our child nutrition programs presents a great opportunity to change the way children eat, to expand their access to nutritious meals and to end the child hunger crisis in our country.

We must ensure that schools have the support they need to provide high-quality meals so kids can make healthy choices. We must also ensure all eligible children can actually access these programs by removing barriers families face when enrolling in the school meal programs.

Today we will learn more about the work that lies ahead to provide all children with healthy, nutritious and meals they need to lead healthy and successful lives. Thanks to the reforms in the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, students across the country are experiencing a healthier school environment with more nutritious meal options. Studies show that kids are now eating up to 16 percent more vegetables and 23 percent more fruit at lunch. Over 90 percent of school systems report they are in compliance with the new federal standards.

Maintaining quality standards for child nutrition programs is not only the right thing to do, but it is what American families overwhelmingly want. According to a recent poll by the Pew Charitable Trusts, 90 percent of parents favor school meal standards.

While it's important to hear from schools and states about challenges they may have in their programs, I'm certain these challenges can be addressed. Thank you to our witnesses for joining us today. I look forward to hearing your testimony.